

City of Taunton

Office of the Mayor

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The Honorable Mayor Thomas C. Hoye, Jr.
State of the City Address
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Council President John McCaul and our extraordinary members of the Municipal Council, Senator Pacheco, Representative O'Connell, and Representative Orrall, Nick Clemons, Representing Congressman Kennedy, elected officials, residents, family and friends. Welcome, and thank you for joining us tonight.

When I look back on 2012, my first year serving as your Mayor, it has been interesting to say the least. Perhaps two of the most overused words heard in politics today are change and cooperation. Both national and local leaders use these words frequently, and usually they are only words. However, here in the City of Taunton, we say these words with pride, importance and weight. Through cooperation we have been able to impart positive change on our city. It has not happened overnight, and it has not always been easy, but it has happened as the direct result of the people in this room working together.

The year 2012 has presented us with not only challenges, but also opportunity. A change in hours at our city offices has improved access for our residents. We enhanced the tax status procedure to make the permitting process less cumbersome for our business owners. Through a series of transition team meetings that we held at the beginning of the year, we learned one of the main concerns from business owners and contractors alike was the length of time that permitting takes within our city. We listened and delivered! The city has ordered the GeoTMS permitting and inspection module so this process can now begin online. The software will be implemented early this year and it will save our residents and business owners' time, and will streamline the permitting process allowing our inspectors to input data and sign permits in real time. I am pleased to report that training, for the Geo TMS system, started this morning.

I mentioned just over a year ago during my inaugural address that with each election cycle comes a promise of the rejuvenation of our historic downtown. I am proud to say that this year was different! In 2012 that promise was developed into actual *progress*. The first phase of our Downtown Improvement Project is complete. The new sidewalks, complete with stamped concrete and steel railings, are stunning. The parking kiosks provide a much more functional and economical way to offer parking. I am looking forward to the completion of Phase 2 by next

fall. We are thankful to the Patrick-Murray Administration for awarding Taunton a \$1.28 million dollar MassWorks grant that will allow the remainder of our Downtown Streetscape to be completed.

We have also recognized the importance of making our own commitment to downtown. The Mayor's Office of Economic and Community Development has allotted \$35,000 for façade improvements to our downtown buildings. A design review committee has been assembled to facilitate this task. This is the first time that the city has offered a program of its kind in our recent history. Downtown will be enriched and you are beginning to see such improvements, but we will not stop there. Pending funding in FY14 my vision is to move the façade program to our neighborhoods, starting in Whittenton and the Weir. In order to ask businesses to invest in our city we have to make our own investment.

Our downtown pledge will not stop there. In 2013, Taunton will work with the Mass Gateway Cities Housing Program and acquire ways to offer tax incentives for developers looking to rehabilitate properties and provide market rate housing in the downtown area. This formula has worked well in other cities, and it can work here too. Together we will continue to rebuild the City of Taunton one neighborhood to the next.

When City Hall is mentioned it elicits frustration in most of our residents. I can tell you with complete honesty that I share your frustration and I am not speaking out of school by saying your City Councilors do as well. As much as I enjoy addressing you all here tonight at the Maxham School, this is not where we should be, we belong back downtown. Since the fire set by an arsonist, plans to return to City Hall have been anything but smooth. At this point in time we cannot go backwards and play Monday morning quarterback. There have been stops, gos, false starts and now litigation, but the show must go on. We formed a Designer Selection Committee, which, after interviewing several candidates, selected Durkee Brown to provide a Historic Structure Evaluation and Design Services for Taunton City Hall. The Designer Selection Committee continues to work with Durkee Brown, which is in the process of gathering all the information they need to advise us of our options for returning to City Hall. I vow to you tonight that we will move forward in putting the economic heart of our city back downtown.

I am proud of the work that our DPW team has completed over the past year. The City of Taunton has some of the oldest infrastructure in the country, and the most roads in the Commonwealth with over 240 miles of streets. That fact is often overlooked. I am pleased with the number of streets that have been repaved, and the water and sewer lines which have been replaced. In the past year we were able to pave 17 streets and 7 sidewalks, not including downtown. In this coming year we expect to pave 15 streets, including Archer Circle, Crossman St., Cushman St., Dismar Road, Fairview Ave., Fisher St., Florence, Forest, Harrison, Laurel, Purchase, Round, Second, Washburn and Wilbur. In addition, we plan to pave 9 sidewalks including; Cushman St., Fairview Ave, Florence St., Harrison St., Purchase St., Randall St., Second St., Washburn St., and Wilbur St.. The complete list is available and will be posted on our website.

This year the City of Taunton received its first ever SAFER Grant worth \$1.35 million, which has allowed us to hire and train 8 new firefighters to add to our depleted ranks. This was the result of our Fire Chief and Union working together with our Federal delegation to bring this vision to reality. I was proud to be a small part of that process. This is the first time the city has hired firefighters since 2008. This year the city has also committed to a lease payment for a new fire

truck in an attempt to modernize the fleet, and through the work of our talented Building Department, our main communication tower located atop the Central Fire Station was replaced.

In our police department, we have filled vacancies created with retirements, and hope to begin the process of hiring additional officers this year. Hiring new officers is crucial to the safety of our city. We can no longer ignore the drug and theft problems that plague Taunton and our region. The Police Department was able to purchase five new cruisers through a generous donation from Steward Hospital.

In the past some of our city streets have been called filthy, and I cannot say I disagree with that statement. I do take such remarks personally, and we are doing something about it. Through our Parks Cemeteries and Public Grounds Department we have instituted a sidewalk vegetation program to deal with problem weeds on our sidewalks, and through our Department of Public Works we have purchased a new street sweeper to clean our roads. Beginning in the spring, our goal is to have two street sweepers out at one time. These changes, coupled with our already improved road side brush program, will make our streets and sidewalks safer and more aesthetically pleasing. The city needs to make this commitment, and more importantly, our residents deserve it.

The Mashpee Wampanoag Tribe's proposed destination resort casino certainly dominated our news during the first half of 2012. The plan was controversial at times, but the voters of Taunton overwhelmingly voted to move forward with the destination resort casino concept. I am pleased to report that ALL of our consultant fees have been paid by the Tribe, and the city has received a \$1.5 million payment from the Mashpee Wampanoag Tribe. A small portion of this money has already been put to good use as we have used it to pay for our electronic permitting system and the remaining engineering work needed to complete the Gordon Owen Riverway/Williams St. Intersection, one of the most dangerous intersections in our city. I am very proud of the way my administration handled this entire process. Jason Buffington and the city's Law Office, and all the Department heads involved, my hat goes off to you. Our Casino update page was complemented by members of the press and elected officials alike throughout our region. I thank Alyssa Gracia specifically for her efforts in keeping the public updated. By this summer we should know definitively whether this project will be given the green light by the Federal Government.

Whether the destination resort casino comes to Taunton or not, we have the great potential of expanding business here in the city over the next several years. Phases 4 and 5 of the Myles Standish Industrial Park are well underway. Infrastructure is currently being put into place through a wonderful partnership between Mass Development, The Taunton Development Corporation and the City of Taunton. Myles Standish Industrial Park offers what many communities cannot; great highway access, a fair tax rate and reasonable utilities. We are seeing the rejuvenation of the Paul Dever State School before our eyes. Ultimately, this project will provide jobs and increased revenue to the City of Taunton. There are major companies taking a serious look at locating here in our city right now.

Job creation in Taunton is crucial, especially given the current economy. We need to provide job placement for our current residents and assist future college graduates in finding a career in the city they were raised. When we put people to work they will reinvest in the local economy so it is a win-win for everyone. As I have said many times, Taunton must control its own destiny and

this project, along with the tangible potential of South Coast Rail, provides us with opportunity to do just that.

Technology in this city is beginning to grow. I mentioned our online permitting, but it is also important to highlight some of the other upgrades this year. The Official City of Taunton Facebook page was created last spring and has already generated over 1700 followers. This is a free resource used to circulate city communications using modern day technology. Social media is the fastest growing electronic database, and the city has been able to reach more of its constituents by starting and monitoring its Facebook page. A website redesign is currently underway to better facilitate communication between the city and our residents. The city's website was effectively utilized in 2012 to spread communication to the public, especially when faced with emergency situations. We have reinstituted our ITAB team, which is looking for ways to improve upon existing technology, while also examining the best ways to utilize staff within our IT department. Our IT department has long been underappreciated and underfunded. If we are truly committed to bringing the City of Taunton into the 21st century, we simply must upgrade our technology when reasonably appropriate.

Speaking of technology, I would like to announce tonight the Commonwealth Citizens Connect program here in Taunton. 2013 will bring a mobile and web application that allows residents to request work orders through their smart phones or over the internet. The City of Taunton applied for this program in 2012 and was selected with other communities across the Commonwealth as part of a state-wide grant, funded through the Community Innovation Challenge Program. This application will allow residents to report quality of life problems, such as graffiti and potholes, directly to the appropriate local government office for resolution. To use Commonwealth Connect, residents will simply download the app, free of charge, and launch it from their smartphones, iPads or computers. Citizens will be able to snap a photo of the problem, note its location and submit it to the city. The resident will then get a tracking number for their case and can see when their issue is resolved. We expect to launch this application in late spring of this year.

Our District Schools have continued to thrive throughout the city. MCAS scores have sustained their upward trend as our city, educators and families continue to invest in our children's future. Our high school project is nearly complete giving us a facility that we can be proud of. Plans for the Aleixo Stadium are ongoing with a goal of completion of the bleachers, ADA and press box upgrades in the upcoming year. Our city will continue to work with the Massachusetts School Building Authority to provide upgrades in our older buildings. Galligan School, for example, is soon to undergo HVAC and roofing upgrades through the MSBA program. I would like to point out that safety protocols at our schools are constantly reviewed and upgrades are done as needed. I want to emphasize to our parents and guardians, not only as your Mayor, but also as the parent of three young children myself, two of which attend elementary school, that safety is the number one priority at our schools. Our schools are and will remain safe.

This year will bring about long overdue and meaningful discussion in regards to our City Charter. One of our priorities for this year is to form a local committee to study our existing Charter and provide recommendations as to how we can better and more efficiently structure our local government. Our current version of the City Charter was passed in 1909 and was intended to govern in a bygone era, and I might add did it well, but today we need a charter that suits the needs of the City of Taunton in the 21st century. The roles of the executive and legislative branches of government need to be clearly defined. Simply put, the legislative branch should

pass the laws and the executive branch should carry them out. That committee will be assembled over the next several weeks.

The New Year will continue to include our highly popular cultural and recreational community events. In 2012 our 99th lighting of our Historic Taunton Green was a huge success and we look forward to our 100th lighting of the green in 2013. A committee is being formed to make this event our biggest and best ever and provide memories to last a lifetime. Fireworks will be back this year to celebrate Independence Day, and we look forward to a community event to coincide with it. Our highly successful kids track series will return for its second year as we strive to create healthy habits in our city's children. We will continue to place emphasis on the arts here in our city and highlight the talented people we have living within our borders.

On a personal note, my first year as Mayor has flown by, and I have to thank some people that have been instrumental in assisting me. It goes without saying that the first person I need to thank is my wife, Stephanie. Without your assistance, love and support I would not be able to do this, period, so thank you!

My assistant, Alyssa Gracia, thank you for all that you do! You learned on the fly and settled into your position faster than anyone could have imagined! You have tremendously improved upon our social media and government communication with the public.

My secretary, Mimi Punda, keeps it moving every day and does a great job in handling inquiries from our residents. Mimi is truly a jack of all trades.

Our budget director, Gill Enos, does a great job on a daily basis and wears many hats beyond his position.

Our Law Department, led by Jason Buffington, has done a tremendous job in keeping legal work in house and saving the city thousands of dollars.

I would like to thank all of our department heads and employees for the jobs that they do on a daily basis, because neither I nor anyone else can do this alone.

I would like to give recognition to the former Mayors, elected officials, and citizens that call and offer advice and most importantly encouragement, on a daily basis.

I thank the City Council for their feedback and support. A true partnership has developed in the past year and I look for that rapport to only grow in the upcoming year.

My friends, this is not my city or just your city, this is our city! We need to take pride in it, embrace it and make it a place we all are proud to call home. I feel that at times Taunton settles for less than we should. It is incumbent upon us as elected leaders to raise expectations and strive to make Taunton the best city in the Commonwealth. Our residents deserve it. Tomorrow is upon us and it is time to reshape and mold the City of Taunton for not only today, but for the next generation as well.

I thank everyone for listening tonight and my door is always open. Thank you and God Bless!